



LITTLE BROTHER O'DREAMS

ELAINE GOODALE EASTMAN

O.P.
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LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS



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LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

BY

ELAINE GOODALE EASTMAN



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TO THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER

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Little Brother o' Dreams

I

LITTLE BROTHER

ONE of his earliest recollections was of standing at a window, watching the big snowflakes sail out of a great, gray void and settle like a flock of white birds upon the waiting earth.

Had he ever seen anything like that before? It seemed to him that he never had. This was the first snow-fall of the year . . . and last winter was a long, long time ago.

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 Closer and closer he pressed to the cold window-pane, straining his eyes to pierce the dizzy emptiness of the upper air, following the mysterious birds in their swift, soundless flight, that seemed to bear them straight into his eager heart. Nearer and nearer they came, growing ever bigger and more beautiful.

 At first he thought it had been so still, that first snow-fall; not like the rain that tapped on the glass with impatient fingers, or the wind that shook the fastenings angrily and cried down the chimney. But when he had looked at the flying birds a long time, he was almost sure that he heard soft singing . . .

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not like the chorus of bird-song on spring mornings, but somehow muffled . . . a far-off, delicate chime that made him so happy he could scarcely breathe.

“O mother, mother! listen to the White Birds singing!”

His mother was busy putting supper on the table, moving about the kitchen with a tread that sounded heavy after that white hurrying dance out-of-doors and that song of the snow, that was so much finer and smaller and sweeter even than the purr of the backlog in the fireplace, or the lisp of the long grass in the meadow, or the heartbeat of the tiny brook under its thick armor

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of ice. Everybody could hear those, he decided presently, but everybody could n't hear the White Birds, for his mother, when he called to her about them, only said:—

“Come away from the window, child; you 'll catch your death o' cold!”

And then, when he asked Don, the hired man, who came in next minute with the milk-pails, first stamping his feet and shaking himself like a big dog just outside the door—when he went close up to Don and asked him quite low if he had n't heard the White Birds singing, the big fellow looked at him hard for a minute out of those clear

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blue, twinkling eyes of his, but all he said was:—

“Been dreamin’ again, sonny?”

Of course he had n’t been dreaming, for how can you possibly dream when you’re not asleep? and he had been quite wide-awake all the time! Still, to be sure, he had n’t heard them himself until he listened very specially close; and mother and Don had so much work to do, they hardly ever had time to listen like that!

In silence he ate his supper of fresh bread and honey, not thinking much about it, except that the honey tasted of last summer, and wondering what flowers the bees liked best, but not wanting to ask, because his

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mother's face still looked a great way off, although she sat quite near him and helped him twice to honey, and filled up his tumbler with new milk. Eating was all very well, he thought, but not half so nice as the music; and he heard it again after he went to bed, where he lay with his eyes shut, thinking about the White Birds and seeing their radiant flight blot out the darkness, until he really did fall asleep.

That was a memorable winter to Little Brother o' Dreams. It was a long, long winter, and cruel cold up there on Fray Mountain. It truly seemed sometimes as if the cold were like wolves, snarling and whining

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just outside the door, reaching in through every crack and cranny in the crazy little old house, with their white fangs and their long, sharp claws that bit and tore. Out-of-doors was so beautiful, but dangerous, like some glorious wild beast; and indoors was safe and warm enough,—for his mother saw to that,—but it was dingy and dull and dark and lonesome, oh, so lonesome! There was n't anybody to talk to. One could n't talk to the chairs and the tables; they were n't alive like the trees and the brook. You might talk a little to the fire, or to the pictures,—for there were two or three pictures,—and of course there was

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mother . . . but then, mother did n't understand. It was hard sometimes when little boys had only mother, and she . . . did n't understand. She hardly ever answered at all when one told her about things, and her eyes looked tired and sad and far away.

To be sure, there was Don too, especially at night, when he came in from doing the chores, and his eyes looked as if he did understand—a little; but he usually said: “What, dreamin' again, boy?” and that was nonsense, you know, when one had n't even been asleep!

One night Little Brother told Don about being so lonesome, after

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a whole week of storm and bitter weather, such weather that he could n't go with Don to the wood-lot on the bob-sled, nor to the mill with corn, and there were only the calves and chickens in the barn, and they were n't so very interesting—they always seemed to be thinking about something to eat!

“Why don't ye l'arn to read, sonny?” asked the big, blue-eyed fellow quite sympathetically. “Would n't that be kind o' company for ye, now?”

“What is that—to learn to read?” Little Brother demanded, his pale, homely little face lighting up marvelously as he spoke.

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“Why, don’t ye know?” said puzzled Don, carefully spreading out the weekly paper on the table, which had just been cleared of the supper dishes. “Look a-here, these little marks all mean somethin’; you l’arn to figger out what they mean, an’ then the paper ’ll talk to ye!”

“And will you tell me what they mean?” pleaded Little Brother, catching fire at once.

“Wa’al, mebbe I can tell ye some on ’em; or mebbe your ma —” He paused in red embarrassment and glanced toward the woman who stood with her back to them, washing dishes, — a woman whose face, hair, and dress all seemed of one

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color; and as she spoke, in a low, monotonous voice, Little Brother thought with a dull ache in his throat that her voice sounded just the same color, too.

“He’s only five; I guess he don’t need to learn to read just yet, ’n’ I’ve no time to teach him. He’ll have to go to school, some day, when he’s old enough. But how—*how* am I to manage it?”

She spoke the last words passionately, under her breath, and threw a look of distress at the boy, whose cheeks by now were fairly blazing and his eyes like hot coals.

Twice he opened his mouth to speak, but the words would n’t come.

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However, as his mother said nothing more and did not even seem to see him at all for the rest of the evening, he snuggled up close to Don in the circle of yellow lamplight, and began to pick out one by one the largest capital letters in the newspaper; and by dint of whispered question and answer he had mastered half of them before bedtime.

The next morning he got hold of the paper again; and since his mother did not forbid him, and even told him a letter or a word now and then, while Don helped sturdily of evenings, it was not many weeks before he graduated into the “Pilgrim’s Progress,” one of the half-dozen books

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on the high shelf beside the clock,— and that was company indeed!

It was soon after this that he began to call himself “Little Brother.”

Somehow, nobody had ever called him by his real name. There was a reason for this, or at any rate a something that was stronger than reason, but they could n’t explain it to the child just yet. And so, not getting a satisfactory answer to his questions about the matter, he had made up his mind to be Little Brother.

“I like that name,” he said, “because it makes me feel as if there were more of us. It is n’t a lonesome name; it’s a nice all-together sort of name!”

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

At last and at last the spring began to come, high up on Fray Mountain. Little Brother felt a good deal as he supposed the brook felt when it burst its icy armor and ran boisterously over the meadow, half laughing and half crying, and all but breaking its little heart for pure joy.

He ran all over the meadow, too ; but when he came in with wet feet and a croak in his throat, his mother put him right to bed with a hot soapstone, and made him take bad-tasting medicine. Happily, a pair of bluebirds flashed past the window on purpose to comfort him, he thought ; and Don brought him a

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bunch of skunk cabbage, but his mother threw that away because, she said, “it smelled so!” To Little Brother it seemed, after all, a good, clean, growing smell.

In a few days he was out again, and beginning expectantly to haunt the remembered places, the sunny, sheltered nooks where, out of cosy nests of dry leaves, they had been used to lift up to his their tender faces — those first flowers of the year! As he knelt one day in a pale ecstasy with arms outspread, making a fence around one little clump of pinkish lavender bloom that he loved far too much to pick, or even to caress it, a song bubbled up to his

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

lips and he began to croon it over softly, scarcely knowing whether the flowers were singing it to him or he to the flowers. It went something like this:—

Little children, little children
Of the spring,
Say, what greeting, happy greeting
Do you bring?

Little sisters, little sisters,
Do you hear?
Is it love, and is it hoping?
Tell me, dear!

Little Brother o' Dreams had never asked about his father—it was not clear to him at this time

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that he had ever had a father. Mothers were everywhere and plainly a necessity. The tree was the mother of all the leaves, and he thought perhaps the mountain was mother of all the trees. The idea of a sister had dawned upon him, too, one scarcely knows how; and although it was not easy for him to speak out his heart's desire, he told his mother once how he would love to have a little sister. But she only said, with unusual sternness:—

“ You will never have a sister; don’t speak of it again! ”

The tears filled Little Brother’s eyes, but he winked them away. Although he was only six years old

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that summer, he never cried aloud except for real hard pain, and even then it was not noisy crying, but a sort of musical wail that really sounded more like a sad singing. This time the tears kept coming faster and faster, and he kept on for some minutes winking and rubbing his eyes and seeing things double, but he made no fuss that anybody noticed, and he did not speak of wanting a little sister again.

He thought of a sister, however, more and more earnestly, and wished for her in fairy rings . . . and by the first star in the sky at twilight . . . until after a time he truly began to expect her to appear in some strange

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fashion — a real little sister, about as big as he was; for, as he argued with himself, there is so much magic in the world, and there isn't any “never,” — that's only what grown-up people say, but it can't be, for everything happens some time!

There was always Don, who was so tall and straight and strong, and so good to look at, and had such a big, soft heart, and who found time, with all his work, to be kinder than ever to Little Brother that summer. He used often to bring him flowers — “blows,” he called them — from swamps and wild places where little boys couldn't go. Once it was a great bunch of very special trail-

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ing arbutus from high up on Fray Mountain ; later on, an armful of the tallest lady's slippers, clear pink and white ; and then the purple rhodora, tremulous as a spray of royal butterflies. Little Brother did n't know their names, and he wouldn't have picked them himself for anything, it seemed as if it must hurt them . . . but he could n't doubt Don's goodness . . . and they were, oh, so beautiful !

It was one of the boy's simple pleasures to bring out his own cup to be filled at every milking-time, and he was always tenderly lifted to the swaying top of every sweet-smelling load of hay and down

LITTLE BROTHER

again, even when a shower threatened and Don was in a hurry. Mother often had to come out into the field herself for the haymaking, and she would say:—

“Never mind about the boy to-day, Don ; there is n’t time !” But, all the same, Little Brother never missed his ride to the barn behind the red and white oxen when he was on hand and ready for it.

The haying was scarcely over that summer when a strange thing happened ; something that had never happened before within the boy’s remembrance. You see, the small, stony farm,— scarcely more than a rough clearing it was, away up on

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the shaggy side of the mountain, — and the ancient little unpainted house, blackened by the weather, and leaning slantwise like some old wind-buffeted tree, were quite off the high-road on a grass-grown cart-track, along which Don and the oxen took their undisputed way to market or to mill.

But on a certain hot day in mid-summer there came through that unfrequented wood-road, where the trees met over your head, straight to the tumble-down cottage smothered in a riot of cinnamon roses and coarse tawny lilies and straggling currant bushes with their strings of scarlet beads, a great mountain wagon drawn

LITTLE BROTHER

by four shining horses and filled with visitors from another world !

They drew up with a flourish at the old wellsweep and called for water, and poor Little Brother o' Dreams shrank back among the tall lilies, vainly hoping himself unseen, for his great, asking eyes had fastened themselves instantly upon the fairylike vision of a little girl — a little girl with tumbled nut-brown curls and delicately modeled features and the softest, most soulful of brown eyes ! All in white she was, this dazzling creature perched high above his head, and Little Brother caught his breath for sheer astonishment and delight; but the next instant

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the brown eyes had fairly met the black ones, and there was that in them that crushed his sensitive little heart.

It was Don who found him, half an hour later, sobbing almost soundlessly, face downward among the lilies.

“Why did she look at me so, Don? Why did she?” was all that he could say.

“Thar, thar, sonny; don’t take on so,” comforted Don, patting the black head, helpless as a man must be, yet tender as a woman.

“She was so beautiful, and no bigger than me, Don. And she looked as if she were half afraid—

LITTLE BROTHER

and — and — half *sorry* for me,
Don !” he sobbed.

It was the end of one chapter in
the life of Little Brother o’ Dreams.

II

LITTLE SISTER

OF course, he knew now that he was different from other children. He supposed that was why his mother hadn't sent him to school ; at least, it must be part of the reason ; and maybe it was why she looked so sad and tired and far away. She *couldn't* love him as much as she could have loved a little boy who was strong and beautiful — of that he was sure. Yes, he was *quite* sure of that !

But the trees loved him, and the

LITTLE SISTER

flowers, and the sky ; and the little people of the woods, the birds and squirrels, did n't mind his poor pale face and his queerly cobbled clothes ; and Don was always good to him, and never looked sorry for him, either ! And then, there were the sunsets on Fray Mountain.

“ O mother, mother ! Is heaven on fire ? ” cried Little Brother one evening when he was only five years old. “ Will it all burn up, mother ? And what will God do then ? ”

Two or three years later he made a poem about the two sunsets — the autumn of day, you know, and the sunset of the year. It was like this : —

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

On the castle of Night a red, red flag,
 that flies for the prince To-morrow;
In the face of the Cold a blazing world;
 and Hope at the door of Sorrow!

You know most of us love the things that are near and can be touched and handled and understood. Little Brother was different. He loved best what was big and far off and mysterious, like the night and thunder-storms and the shadowy pine wood where he dared not go alone, for that would be to disobey his mother. She had said that he might get lost. Not that he was afraid of getting lost; it seemed to him that to be lost in such a quiet, holy place would be like going to church and

LITTLE SISTER

just forgetting all about the rest of the world ; and as he said to himself by way of argument — for he was fond of reasoning things out with himself — “ She means that I might not know where I was or the way home ; but God would always know, and He would be sure to show me the way when it was time to go.” However, his mother had forbidden him to go there alone ; and he was an obedient child.

He had all sorts of strange fancies about Night. Oftenest she seemed to him a beautiful and grand woman with a great deal of long black hair, covering her all up but her eyes, which shone like stars. Afraid of

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the dark? He *loved* the dark; and yet his bed-time was at seven o'clock in winter and eight in summer, and he had never been out-of-doors at night in his whole life!

And then there was the majesty of a summer thunder-storm sweeping over Fray Mountain. How he shivered for pure joy in its approach, feeling to the ends of his fingers, and in every hair of his head, the electric thrill and tingle of it! The impulse to run out in the face of all that stir and secret turmoil, out and up to some high, open place where he could read every bit of the silver writing on the cloud and feel himself for those few high moments the

LITTLE SISTER

centre of the clash of elements and crash of worlds,—this impulse was very strong in Little Brother o' Dreams.

Once it actually mastered him. The child slipped away unseen while his mother was hurrying to shut doors and windows against the heralding wind, and, flying up through the wood like a hunted thing, was standing alone on the bare, bald mountain summit when the floods were let loose out of heaven.

Half an hour afterward, a dripping, rain-beaten, and altogether forlorn little figure appeared to his startled mother at the cottage door in the last throes of the storm, with

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a strange, uplifted look upon his pale, wet face that made her draw him hastily within and chide in muttered undertones, harmless as the echoes of the departing thunder. He never remembered being punished for naughtiness; somehow, it was impossible to *punish* Little Brother!

Now there are certain trees that come into the story, for they were very friendly to the boy. He loved all trees, of course; but there were some that stood up grand and noble, kissing the sky — trees that one would scarcely venture to speak to; and then again there were others whose branches bent lovingly over and caressed your face, whose as-

LITTLE SISTER

pect, homely and almost human, invited your confidence.

One very special tree was an old curly maple, knotted and gnarled, with a broad, low, comfortable seat quite near the ground; and hidden among a world of pointed, gothic-shaped leaves in the lap of that old mother-maple, Little Brother told her many things. More than once or twice he told her about the little girl—or the fairy, he was n’t quite sure which—who was so very beautiful, and yet whose loving brown eyes had hurt him so without meaning to do it. (He knew all the time that they did n’t mean to hurt.)

At first the sting had been sharper

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even than his delight in her loveliness; but the more he thought about it, the sweeter it was to think of so perfect a creature; and patiently as the tree herself takes a fresh wound right into her heart and surrounds it with living wood, he accepted the hurt, and covered it up and smoothed it over until nothing but a little scar was left — a scar that only Don noticed.

Not far from the old maple there was a brown brook that rippled in singing shallows over a pebbly bottom; and as this brook was so tiny that even the most anxious or careful mother could not conceive it to be a danger, Little Brother was al-

LITTLE SISTER

lowed to play there, on the express condition that he must not wet his feet.

Since he did not know how to play like other children, fishing, and sailing boats, and skipping stones, and since wading was forbidden, he usually lay flat on his face at the edge of the curling water, gazing downward into one or another of the clear, brown pools, which reflected his own small, pinched features—and something more! How much more, no one knew but Little Brother. And one long, long midsummer day while he lay thus, a whole year after the coming of the strangers to Fray Mountain,

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

there came of a sudden to his ears a pitiful little cry, like that of a lost or frightened bird,—just one cry, and then silence.

Little Brother awoke instantly from his dream of a sweet face looking up to meet his from the rounding ripples in the pool, and scrambling to his feet, he scurried along like a rabbit in the direction of the sound. The ground was rough, and in a little hollow there was a heap of something white, which he soon made out to be a little girl who had fallen and was frightened or hurt, or perhaps both. She sat up as he came near, and he saw tumbled brown curls, and brown eyes that

LITTLE SISTER

met his, this time, with neither pity nor fear, but with a flash of pleased surprise.

“Oh, it is you, little boy!” she exclaimed joyfully.

“I’m not Little Boy,” he replied at once. “I’m Little Brother!”

“Then if you’re Little Brother, I must be Little Sister!”

The old, old wish had come true; he had found a sister at last!

A red blush of delight covered his whole face as he held out a small, frail hand to help the little maiden to her feet. But with a merry laugh, she sprang lightly up, and gamboled about him like a

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

young fawn, chanting over and over:—

“I was n’t hurt a bit, not a bit, not a bit! I was running and I caught my foot in a vine and it tripped me up, and I cried out because I was all alone!”

“But you won’t be all alone now you have found me, Little Sister!”

“No, of course I shan’t, Little Brother! But what do you do here? Show me everything in this wood, and tell me all the stories you know!”

So he took her to the old mother-tree, the maple whose lap was so nice and wide and her arms so comforting, and who kept secrets so well.

LITTLE SISTER

There was just room for two in the lap of the good old tree.

Next, he took her to the lady birch, who seemed to be ever leaning forward as if she were listening, ever trying to pull her one foot out of the ground, so that he thought she wanted to get away and to go somewhere else — to the other side of the world, perhaps!

“And where is the other side of the world, Little Brother ?”

“Why, it’s over the mountain, where the sun goes when it sets,” he answered.

And then he showed her the old man hemlock, shaggy-haired and silent and sober; but the birds and

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the squirrels were fond of him, Little Brother said ; there were ever so many foot-prints around him in the winter-time !

“ Do you live here in the winter, too ? ”

He fancied that the little girl shivered a bit as she spoke.

“ Why, yes. Don’t you ? But I think you must live on the other side of the world, Little Sister, where it is always summer, and you have the sun when there isn’t any sun here ; and that must be what makes your hair so bright and beautiful . . . and your face . . . ”

But she was dancing on before him ; and they came to the tiny brook,

LITTLE SISTER

and there she said, quite suddenly: “I must go home, now!” And the next minute she was gone.

The brown brook and the mother-maple were a long, long way from home, Little Brother thought. You see, he was only seven years old. It might have been half a mile, at the foot of the mowing; and his mother only let him go there when Don was in the meadow and had promised to “keep an eye on the little feller.” Fortunately, haying had begun again, and Don was too busy to want more than a glimpse of the little hurrying figure now and then,— he “wasn’t the sort o’ little chap to need watch-

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in', nohow," — and so the very next day he went to the same spot and waited quietly until he saw Little Sister again, as he had been quite sure he would. He had lain awake long from happiness on his small cot, staring at the cracked and stained plaster of the uneven walls, where he had been used to fancy all sorts of pictures after he went to bed. But the only picture he saw that night was of an arch and lovely little face with eyes as brown as the clearest pool, looking out from a mass of tumbled curls.

As soon as she spied him again, Little Sister ran to meet him, crying happily: —

LITTLE SISTER

“I’ve come to hear the stories this time, Little Brother!”

“I’m afraid I don’t know any stories—not any of my very own, I mean; but I know poems, ever so many poems! Shall I say a poem for you?”

“Yes, do say a poem, Little Brother!”

Then they found a soft seat on a mossy bank, and Little Brother began:—

“I love sweet fairyland;
I love the lovely flowers;
Their faces smile upon me
To lighten weary hours.

“I love the grass;
I love the sky;

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Thro' its deep-blue glass

God looks down from high!"

"That's nice," praised the little girl softly. "Where do the poems come from?"

"Oh, they just *grow*," explained Little Brother.

"They don't grow in this wood, do they? If they do, it must be a fairy wood. I almost think it is, anyhow!"

"They grow right up inside of me—just sing themselves to me, you know! Whenever I'm happy, I make a poem about it; and when I'm sad, I often make a poem about that, too. Yesterday, before I saw you, I had been crying; and

LITTLE SISTER

after a while I stopped, and I felt so light, I felt like singing; and I began to sing this:—

‘ Rain that washes the air, where dryness and dust has been,
And tears that wash my heart, and leave it shining and clean ! ’ ”

“ I like poems, whether they’re sad or happy,” declared Elva — for that was her name. “ But it’s time for me to go home now — I ’most know it is! If your mother asks you anything, you can say you dreamed a sister in the wood. That’s what I told them yesterday.”

“ She never asks me anything,” said Little Brother sadly, “ only if

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I got my feet wet, and if I want my dinner.”

“Well, they asked me where I had been so long, and I said in the wood. I said I played with my dream-brother, and they just laughed ; they don’t think you are real, you see !”

“But I am real !” exclaimed Little Brother in an anxious voice.

“Of course you are ; but I shall go on calling you my dream-brother, because if they were to know about you, maybe they would n’t let me come here any more.”

With these words everything seemed to get dark and cold all at once, and he could only cry out pitifully :—

LITTLE SISTER

“But you *are* coming again, aren’t you?”

“Of course I am, Little Brother! Don’t cry, dear; I’m coming ’most every day, if I can. And I want you to say another poem for me to-morrow!”

. . . And then she was gone.

III

FOLDED WINGS

“P’RAPS you ’d call it a poem, and p’raps you would n’t,” proposed a small, sweet voice in his ear — a voice with just a hint of archness behind the modesty that veiled it.

Little Brother had been dreaming again . . . but he sprang to his feet in an instant, blushing all over with happiness, and not the least bit embarrassed because he had n’t heard her coming. To tell the whole truth, he never thought of her as *coming*

FOLDED WINGS

at all. To his eyes she was like a fairy, or the first star at twilight, or like the earliest dandelion in the grass: one minute it is n't there, and the next minute it is there, and that is all you know about it!

“ Oh ! ” he breathed, when he saw her, and stood quite still.

“ You see,” the sweet voice went on, “ you did something for me yesterday, but I haven't showed you yet what *I* can do. Do you want me to show you now, Little Brother? ”

“ I do — you know I do ! ”

“ Well, I s'pose I did know it, but I wanted to hear you say it ! ” And this time the archness was uppermost.

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

They were in a little grassy space at the foot of the mother-maple; for you know such a great old tree must have elbow-room! The little girl promptly stepped back a pace or two, picked up the hem of her brief white skirt with the finger-tips of either hand, and swept an airy curtsy that made the leaves of the tree tremble as with pleased laughter. The boy sank down at its gnarled feet, clasped his two hands around his knees in a favorite attitude, and waited expectantly.

Trilling in her clear fluty voice a little tune without words, a tune that seemed to be made of silvery cobwebs and cold dew and the early

FOLDED WINGS

awakening of the birds, Elva began now to dance to her own music, at first slowly, advancing into the open and retreating to the shadow of the woods, now poised and quivering like a butterfly above a flower—now pirouetting as delicately as that same flower fluttered by a breeze.

Opposite the mother-maple, on the further side of the clearing, beckoned the lady birch, and to her the little maiden advanced as to a partner, holding out her slim foot in its buckled sandal to meet the one extended foot of the tree, bowing and sliding and saluting with gravest merriment and infinite witchery.

Presently, for sheer lack of breath,

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she ceased to flute her melody, but went on dancing faster and faster, whirling as the brook whirls in a small foam-crested eddy, flinging out her slender arms and legs with all the innocent abandon of childhood, yet not without a hint of tender coquetry.

To Little Brother, as he sat there all huddled and motionless but for his eyes that never left her flying shape, it seemed that the lady birch leaned and fluttered forward more eagerly than ever, as if she would pull her one white foot with its high-arched instep quite out of the ground and spring to salute her dainty partner. He fancied, too,

FOLDED WINGS

when the sweet, breathless little song grew fainter and wavered off into silence, that it was taken up tenderly by many voices of the wood—the whirring of insects and whisper of leaves and cheep of young birds, even the patter of little unseen feet and the stir of invisible wings, all seemed to be carrying the quaint tune to which she danced on and on, a white little vision that somehow rhymed with Happiness!

At last she stopped and threw herself down to rest. He started up with a cry of fear, which turned into a little scream of joy.

“Oh, I see you, I see you! I thought you had danced into the

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tree — that it had opened and shut you in ! ”

“ Did you like it ? ” she smiled, when the scurrying little figure came up to her as if blown by a gust of wind, and curled itself up again at her feet. “ I ’m sorry I don ’t know the words to it — ”

“ Some poems have n ’t any words, you know, ” he answered. “ I ’ve heard them often, but I could n ’t make any one else hear them as you do. Why, you can make people *see* the poem — you make it come alive ! I did n ’t even remember that it was *you* — until I did n ’t see you any more ! ”

“ Nobody taught me that one ; I

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made it up my own self," she prat-tled on, warm and flushed with his praise.

"Why, do they teach you poems in school?"

"I never went to school; the school comes to me," Elva said quite grandly. "My father is a—a—He just tells people to do things and they do them!"

"I know—a king!" Little Bro-ther interrupted eagerly.

"Well, p'raps so; anyway, the masters all come to our house and they teach me everything. One taught me to dance; I learned all the steps he knew, I think; and then I made up some of my own, and I like

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mine a great deal better than his! My mother used to sit at the piano and make music just for me — not like the dancing-master's music: it was full of shadows and sunbeams and laughing and crying; sometimes like the rain on the roof after you 've gone to bed, and sometimes like the sound of the sea a long way off. But you 've never heard that, have you, Little Brother? Well, you see, I dance to fit the music: slowly, like praying, or fast, like throwing kisses. But now my mother has gone to live with the angels, and the stars, and I have to dance to my own music," she ended sorrowfully.

Little Brother understood. Peo-

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ple went up among the stars and never came back any more. It must be beautiful, but rather cold and far away, he thought. Elva's mother would never put her to bed again, or hear her say her prayers. After a minute or two of silence, he remarked:—

“That must be harder than just not having things—to have something and lose it! I did n't lose my father, you see, because I never had any father. I've got everything now that I ever had—and something more!”

“What shall you do when I have to go away again—to the other side of the world, you know?” she asked. Then such a look came into

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his face that she was sorry she said it, and hastily added: —

“But that won’t be for ever and ever so long — oh, all summer and all summer! We don’t need to think about *that*! Let’s go make a daisy chain.”

Hand in hand they started. The steep slope of the long, narrow mowing was not far away, and once nestled down deep in the high grass the two children felt safely invisible. Little Brother had never made a daisy chain, never even heard of one; but his long, sensitive fingers were soon as deft as hers in tying the links of living green.

“You didn’t tell the name of your poem,” he suggested.

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“My dance? Oh, it has n’t any name, I guess.”

“A poem ought to have a name, always. I think the name of that one is ‘Morning’!”

“I think so too, and I’m going to dance the ‘Evening,’ to-morrow, with my daisy chain! You hide and turn and hold up the chain before your face, like a veil. The yellow hearts of the daisies will do for stars.”

“Couldn’t you dance it now, Elva, dear?”

“Not now; I have to go in a minute. They might come to look for me. Where shall we hide the chains till to-morrow?”

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Ah, who was to tell them that daisies wither overnight!

“We’ll hide them in my treasure-tree. I never showed you that, did I? It’s quite a nice secret,” he told her joyfully.

“I’ve got a treasure-chest of my own,” said she. “It’s made of wood that smells very sweet, and there are little people, strange little people, dancing and playing all around the lid. It has a lock and key. I wear the key around my neck — see!”

Around her slender neck under her dress she wore a fine gold chain. She pulled this out, and held up the tiny golden key.

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“Mine hasn’t any key,” Little Brother admitted. “You see, it doesn’t need any, because you wouldn’t know there was anything in it unless I told you. It’s like the treasure-places of the squirrels and some of the other wood-people: they never lock anything up but you can’t find their hidings because they hide them in such common, plain places! There are so many trees; how are you to know which is the treasure-tree?”

“*I* should n’t ever know,” she said, standing suddenly still in the midst of the wood where they had been walking rather aimlessly, as it seemed to her, and looking around

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in a confused sort of way on the endless vista of gray pillared trunks and over-arching, sunshot foliage.

With a little laugh of triumph, the boy thrust his hand and arm into a hollow at about his own height from the ground, and partly concealed by the stub of a limb, in the very tree nearest where they stood. It might have been a deserted wood-pecker's nest, for he was able presently to reach down to the very bottom and to bring up several small objects, which they turned over one by one in silence.

There was a curious pebble with shining streaks in it; a pale brown cocoon; a snake-skin, dry and lacy;

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an empty wasp's nest; the nearly perfect shell of a robin's egg; a feather tipped with clear yellow, and several other things of which Elva did not know the names, and at which she looked with politely veiled indifference.

“I wish you could see mine!” she said at last. “There are strings and strings of beads, all sorts—gold and amber and sandal-wood and white and pink coral and pearls; sashes and scarfs of the beautifulest silk, some of them stiff with flowers, and some soft enough to pull through my ring; a fluffy great fan of white feathers and carved sticks—carved out of ivory, that's ele-

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phant's teeth, you know; another fan painted with dancing little cupids by a great artist—" She stopped quite out of breath.

But Little Brother was not impressed either. "I love these best," he said gently, "because the little snake's lace dress was part of her once; and this feather was a bird's till it dropped right out of the sky and I picked it up; and this one *is* alive, you know—really and truly alive!"

The fuzzy, pale brown cocoon lay in his sensitive palm, and he gazed at it very earnestly.

"All the live things don't move — or speak. Maybe you don't know what it is, Little Sister?"

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“What is it, then?”

“It’s a butterfly — asleep. Ssh — don’t wake it up!”

The wood was very still. It was high noon; not a bird nor a breeze stirring. The world seemed full of things waiting to be made perfect — things alive, but speechless.

After a while he spoke, almost in a whisper: —

“Folded wings, folded wings, certain of the morn ;

Angel heart, angel heart, waiting to be born !

Gently rock the cradle, dear ; gently, for my sake ;

On a day, on a day, I shall surely wake ! ”

And then Little Brother put the

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cocoon carefully back, with all the other treasures, back into the dark hollow of the old tree, and both children turned away and went several steps without speaking.

“Now I wouldn’t know which tree it was,” Elva murmured, stopping short and looking to this side and that at the gray columns and shimmering green canopy of the forest-house. “It’s a beautiful secret! I do love secrets, but sometimes they frighten me a little. Aren’t you frightened of our secret sometimes, Little Brother?”

“Our secret?” he wondered.

“Yes, of course. *You* are my secret, you know, and I’m yours! What

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would they say if they found us out — my father, I mean, or your — mother?"

"I never thought about it before, but somehow I don't believe my mother *could* see you; there are lots of things I see and she doesn't. Maybe Don . . . but he's haying now, and then comes harvest . . . those are the only times I play alone so much. When the White Birds begin to fly again he'll take me with him — if I'm let to go out at all; and I could n't come here any more, perhaps . . ."

"But I shan't be here then, silly boy! . . . Don't look so; you *knew* I had to go back to the other side of

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the world, some time! Would they scold you if they found us out? They never scold me any more—not since my mother went up into the sky!"

"I met a snake once," Little Brother considered. Elva made a little face. "She was very pretty: a slim, green, little girl-snake, I think, with very bright eyes and a tongue like young lightning. It was a long time ago—before I found you—and I *was* fond of that snake!"

He spoke slowly, remembering, and she looked just a little hurt, now.

"I supposed she must be a sort of fairy—or even perhaps my little sister." (Elva's lips tightened with indignation.) "That was before I had

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a real little sister, you see ! I played with that green little snake, and I talked to her. She lived near a big rock in the pasture, and I used to go there with things to eat and call her till she came out. She got to know me very well. Then I would take her and let her wind around my neck.” (Here Elva shivered and hid her face in both hands.) “One day my mother called me to supper and I did n’t hear. I was playing with my snake-sister. She came all the way to the pasture after me, and she saw us together . . .” He stopped suddenly.

“And what did she do then?” teased Elva.

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“ She screamed right out . . . and she took hold of my hand and said to come home quick and I must n’t ever go there any more! So I never saw my little snake-sister again,” he ended quite sorrowfully.

A sweet, mocking laugh seemed to come from somewhere behind him, but when he looked around, Little Brother was alone again.

IV

IF I WERE A BIRD

THE little crooked house on Fray Mountain was pretty old . . . as much as a hundred years old, maybe. The floors were uneven and had great cracks in them where things got lost sometimes. The rooms were of odd shapes and sizes, with now and then a step up or a step down from one to another, and when you forgot the step it meant a tumble! There were cunning little chimney-cupboards, where the jam was kept and the

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honey, so high that even mother stood on a chair to reach them; and one so near the floor that you found it just right to hold your own special treasures. The doors all had iron latches that you could barely lift when you stood a-tilttoe, and in the kitchen, which was the largest room in the house, there was a yawning fireplace and a tall brick oven that had never been used since Little Brother could remember. His mother baked in a stove. He often thought he would have liked a slice of his grandmother's rye bread, out of that wonderful brick oven!

A house as old and as much lived

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in as this is something more than just dead wood and plaster. It can't help knowing secrets; you think of it almost as a sort of person. Little Brother o' Dreams felt sure, indeed, that the old house, like an old nurse, knew him through and through. He begged to be allowed to creep after his mother when she went with a candle into the dark, dusty, cob-webby store-room up under the eaves, choked with odds and ends of broken furniture and ancient trunks crammed with yellowed papers and cast-off finery. Even the ponderous beams above his head filled him with a sort of awe.

But most of all he loved and

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feared the huge central chimney — actually a house within a house, so vast was it. In summer, when there was no fire, he loved to creep into the biggest of the clustering fire-places whose black throats yawned wide, like the throats of great birds, and to peer up into its dark, sooty spaces — up, up to the bit of blue sky at the top!

Little Brother knew that the Flame Spirit roared up the chimney and away, and never came back any more; he knew that the Smoke, a sort of pale brother to the Flame, crept like a dim ghost out of the top and silently floated off into the sky; he knew, too, something about

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Santa Claus, for Don had told him that!

Sometimes there was a voice in the chimney-corner—a strange, crying, sorrowful, lonesome voice. He thought at first it was the old house talking to him . . . but his mother said it was only the wind. So to Little Brother's fancy there were always those four dwelling in the dark, mysterious house within a house—Flame, who was a bright goblin; Smoke, a pale ghost; the Wind, an old witch; and Santa Claus—of course, every child knows what *he* looks like!

Now it happened that on a cool August morning, at about the turn

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o' the year, there was quite a strange noise in the chimney, behind the board with which his mother often closed up the opening in the summer-time. Little Brother noticed it first when he was beginning to eat his breakfast of hasty-pudding and milk. It wasn't like the crying of the old witch ; and besides, there wasn't a breath of air stirring that morning, though it had blown hard enough over-night.

It was a queer, shrill, whirring sound, like the song of the cricket, only louder ; like the silver rattle of that snake that is so careful to say, “Don't meddle with me !” — yet it wasn't exactly like that, either.

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Little Brother left his spoon in the blue bowl ; the smoke curled up from the golden depths of the pudding that he had forgotten, and his eyes grew bigger and bigger as he listened.

“ Eat your breakfast, child,” urged his mother.

She was always wanting him to eat, Little Brother thought, and there were so many more interesting things than eating !

“ But the voices in the chimney, mother ! I hear somebody talking, and I don’t know who it can be ! ”

“ It’s young chimney-swallows, of course. Another nest fallen down ! ” complained his mother, and

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she brought the hatchet and pried off the board.

There was a little heap of soot and ashes in the unused fireplace, and on it a queer bracket or shelf of sticks glued together, while scattered helplessly about lay four strange-looking little birds—sooty-black as to their feathers, yellow as to their open beaks, and from those beaks there came the whirring, hissing noise!

Little Brother picked them up tenderly one by one and laid them back on the shelf-like nest, which he held carefully in both hands.

“What shall I do with them, mother?” he begged. “Must I bring

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the ladder and climb up the chimney and put them back?"

"Put them on the roof, and the mother-bird will come after them," she answered.

The old roof-tree pitched down in a steep slant at the back of the little house, from peak to woodshed, and the shed roof was low enough for Little Brother to reach, with the help of a wooden chair. He saw some black-winged elves darting in and out of the chimney, wildly crying and calling, and so kept watch until the nestlings were found and comforted.

But the birds in the chimney were a puzzle to Little Brother. He care-

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fully kept the shelf-like nest to show to Elva in the wood, and to her and to no one else he said over the poem he had made that morning :—

Why do you live in a small, dark room,
you children of air and light,—
In a house that is tired and old and sad,
where men have been born and died?
If I were a bird I would live like a bird,
on the highest wind-washed height,
In the bending tip of the topmost tree,
where the heavens are opened wide !

The children continued to meet in the wood, though not every day. Little Brother always went to the place where he had seen her first, and where he could be happy thinking about her, even if she did not

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come. He had not thought it all fairly out, but the real truth of the matter was that the little maid's father had bought a great estate and built a summer castle that he called a "cottage" on the eastern slope of the mountain. Her pretty young mother was in heaven, and just now she had a giddy new nurse who was glad enough to be free for an hour or two at a time, and who told the under-gardener that she "didn't see how the child could come to any harm, picking a few flowers in the wood by herself!" She paid no attention at all to the tale of a "dream brother." Elva had told fairy stories before.

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The boy's mother, who worked early and late (for they were really very poor), trusted him chiefly to Don's watchfulness out-of-doors; and Don, who was in the midst of haying and harvest, working alone for the most part (which was terribly inconvenient), only took time to notice that Little Brother was quite safe, and even looking unusually well. The pathetic little face with the full, pouting lips and high, peaked forehead had actually got quite brown, and round with something of childhood's roundness, and a new expression had crept into the big, black, speaking eyes.

And now it was September, and

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the week of the “Cattle Show.” Don always went; it was the holiday of the year to him, as to all the hard-working hill-folk on their scattered farms.

The harvest of a hundred gardens, orchards, and dairies, glowing pyramids of fruits, flowers, and vegetables; butter and sparkling honey and preserves; glistening coats of prize cattle, strutting plumed cocks and snowy rabbits and spotted guinea-pigs; the thrill of the races and the joy of the great, good-natured, gayly dressed crowds pushing and jostling and eating and drinking and in love with life — Little Brother had the grandest possible notion of the whole

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splendid rustic pageant. Don had told him all about it many a time.

To be sure, he had never seen it for himself — how should he? He had never expected to go — scarcely even thought of such a thing until he knew Elva. She was no older than he, it seemed; and yet she had seen all the wonders of the world — the ocean and the town; the iron horse and the white-winged ships; the churches, the pictures, the men and women that loomed vaguely in the distance, like objects seen large through a fog — dimly glorified in his dreams!

“Don is going to Cattle Show to-morrow,” he told her one day,

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watching gravely to see how she took the great news. "I s'pose you're going too? I s'pose kings always go and take their little girls?"

"Why, no," she answered, "I don't think I am. I don't know anything about it. What *is* Cattle Show?"

Then he told her, proudly and at length, all that he had heard or dreamed about that yearly festival; and so colored by his fancy, it did indeed appear a spectacle fit for kings!

"I'll ask my father," Elva declared at last. "Maybe you'll see me there. I shall wear my very prettiest dress! Are you going with Don to-morrow, Little Brother?"

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Then it was that shame and pride together filled the poor little heart so full that he could not speak at all. He saw that she supposed of course he had seen more than once all these glories, which he had unfolded to her as though he had some part in them; and he simply could not tell her now how it really was. She might think that he had not *meant* to tell the truth! So he said nothing, but just struggled mightily with his terror of great shyness, and at last bravely made up his mind that he *was* going to Cattle Show!

Something choked in his throat, to be sure, whenever he tried to ask his mother about it; but he believed

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that Don would not be able to refuse him. He would try.

Little Brother slipped away unnoticed the next morning, while Don, who had put on the black suit he wore of occasional Sundays, and to funerals, was loading his biggest pumpkins and his finest fowls into the ox-cart and whistling his prettiest as he worked. The boy sped along faster and farther than he had ever ventured alone before and waited nearly a mile from home, at the old watering-trough, which was where the grass-grown back road joined the main highway. There he shrank back among the bushes, trembling with hope and fear, till Don's

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red and white oxen, wearing wreaths of goldenrod about their thick necks, swung round the turn at festal speed. Then he stood forth, a pathetic little figure enough in his home-made clothes, with his black mop of hair and small, frightened face.

“Won’t you *please* take me with you to Cattle Show, Don?”

“Why, what you doin’ here all by yerself, Little Brother? Good land!”

“Don, won’t you *please*? ”

“Wa’al, wa’al, I’d like fust-rate to take ye along, but your ma — she’d never fergive us! Run back, now, quick’s ye can, ’fore she misses ye, and stay right clus to hum

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all day, an' I'll — I'll bring ye suthin' to-night when I come back — I will, sure! Gee, haw!" And cart and garlanded oxen and blue-eyed giant were gone!

If Little Brother cried until he was tired out,—for Don, even Don had failed him,—there were only the trees and the shy wood-birds to hear. It was a long walk home, too (maybe you 've noticed that it 's always so much longer, going back); but I don't think his mother missed him. You see, she had her work to do, and the boy was almost always out-of-doors in fine weather and seldom far away. When he stole into the kitchen at last, he found it

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fragrant with spicy gingerbread; and he was scratched and stained crimson, but a good deal comforted, by the well-defended sweets of a big blackberry patch which he had found at the brookside, above the old watering-trough.

The red balloon that Don brought home to him that night danced and quivered as if it were the heart of the great world from which it came, Little Brother thought, and its eager tugging at the string that he wound tightly about his hand felt like the impatience of some live thing fretting for freedom. And when it really did escape at last from the reluctant little hand, and soar up into

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the darkling evening sky, a piece of his own heart seemed to go with it.

Already the swamp-maples had begun to signal to one another with their red lanterns; and now the birches turned yellow like ripe wheat, the beech and ash golden-tawny, the sumach crimson and the oaks purple. For a day the Forest wrapped her gorgeous garment about the children, who gave no thought to the certain change that hung over their happiness.

They untiringly gathered the most beautiful leaves and treasured them as great riches — until they found others yet more beautiful!

“This is the tree of the spotted

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leaves," explained Little Brother, picking up several that were curiously blotched with red and green. "I know 'most every tree around here ; they are all different, just like people. I think they choosed their own dresses, don't you ? Don thinks so, too. He doesn't think it hurts *really* when you have to cut them down, but I don't believe he likes to do it very well!"

"Maybe he doesn't care. Our gardener doesn't," remarked Elva. "He's just a hired man, I s'pose."

"Just a man — that's all. But next to being a king, — and everybody can't be that, you know, — the best thing to be is a man, is n't

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it? And that's just what Don really is! Elva, Don is my *friend*, too. I do wish you knew each other, dear!"

That very night Elva's grave-faced father took her on his knee, and gently and kindly began to question her as he had not done before.

"Tell me some more about this Dream Brother of yours, little daughter," he said.

She gazed straight into his sad, searching eyes.

"He makes poems, father," she said unexpectedly.

"What sort of poems, Elva? Where does he get them?"

"They grow right up out of his

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heart, he says. I can say one of them to you now.” And she did.

“Hm, hm,” said her father. “Tell me what he looks like, daughter.”

“He looks — oh, he looks — different! And he *is* different. But you see he’s my Little Brother and I’m his Little Sister that he had been looking for ever so long, and p’raps he’ll die if I don’t come any more; and I — shan’t die, because I don’t want to die; but you *will* let me go to the wood every day, won’t you, father dear?”

“Is my child a poet?” thought the father. “Or is there really some one in the wood?”

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The next day, when Elva slipped away from her careless nurse and stole into the forest, some one followed, and saw, and partly understood.

The day after that, he made some quiet inquiries about the tumble-down cottage on the mountain-side, and he heard about the young woman who had lived there alone with her little son ever since his father — who was from the city, they said — went away and never came back any more. He heard that she had no friends and never went anywhere . . . that the boy was puny and sickly, and some said not quite right in his mind . . . and that

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they never called him by his real name, but only “Little Brother.” He heard, too, about the faithful hired man who farmed the tiny place and doubtless kept the woman and child from going “on the town,” though she herself toiled almost like a man!

And when he had learned all that was known or guessed in the village, Elva’s father called, on foot and very modestly, at the crooked little old house set in its tangle of weeds and flowers.

There was a long, low-voiced talk between those two — the rich man who had lost the wife of his heart, and whose thick hair was streaked

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with white, though not from years, and the woman whose youth and prettiness were quite, quite gone, and who had only her memories and her poor, frail boy with the weakly little body that it hurt her to look at, and the poet-soul that she could not understand.

Strangely enough, after that first shock of meeting as strangers, the two seemed to have known each other a long time.

“And I may take him then—at any rate until next summer?” the man said at last.

She had been crying a little, softly, and her sad, dull-colored face was mottled with red, but she answered

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“Yes,” at once, in that monotonous, dull-colored voice of hers.

“It is best, I think. And *you* shall be cared for — don’t be afraid,” he told her gently.

“Oh, I’m not afraid for myself — it is n’t that! But Little Brother — he’s so different! I can’t bear to have people laugh at him — to have them think —” She choked.

“Your son is — you must n’t be afraid for him, ever! He is n’t what you think he is. People won’t dare to smile at him — they won’t be able to be sorry for him! Only wait a little — and trust to me!”

He smiled, with a smile that flashed suddenly like sunlight over

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his grave face, and parted from her with a bow that seemed, just for a minute, to turn the crazy little old house into a stately mansion. Is that the way it is with kings, I wonder? And so the butterfly awoke, and the new life came to Little Brother o' Dreams.

V

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD

LITTLE Brother o' Dreams knew by heart all the imps and sprites and fairies of the mountain-side, but not until a sombre, veiled day at the close of November had he ever known the hateful little demon of Noise. I think perhaps the shrill scream and the rude snorting of the fearful iron horse that carried him away with a rush from the sleepy little hamlet in the "Hollow," at the foot of Fray Mountain, was the

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first real true *noise* he had ever heard in all his life. For in the country there is no noise — only sound, which is quite a different thing. Most country sounds are gentle, you know, and one sound rhymes with another, so that it is like a sort of song.

Little Brother crumpled all up in his chair and shook as a frightened leaf shakes in the teeth of a wicked wind, after he had looked just once out of the car window and seen the dizzy landscape reel backward, the purple mountain as it were melting down, the bare-limbed trees dancing like mad, black shadows, and had felt himself borne onward with a sweep and swirl as if he were flying.

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He shrank down into a huddled little heap and was miserably silent. He had not known it would be like this. This seemed more like dying and going to heaven, he thought, than just going to the other side of the world!

The hours seemed to lengthen into years . . . but at last and at last the monster that carried Little Brother on his back swept shrieking into the city of his dreams! He saw it towering terribly skyward, and blotting out God and his heaven with the thick smoke of its million chimneys, and his sensitive ears were newly stunned and his whole soul fairly beaten down and trampled

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upon by its awful and unmeaning roar. Now even the pitying touch of Elva's silk-soft hand could not hold him up. He stumbled and fell, and did not know who gathered him into strong arms and bore him to a waiting carriage, nor when the carriage finally stopped and he was lifted out of its cushioned depths and gently deposited in the arms of a great easy-chair in a wonderful room that was like nothing he had ever seen in all his life, where the dreadful din was mercifully shut out, or heard only as the pleasant hum of a hive through the long, richly curtained windows.

For the first few days of this strange

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new life the child was as one walking in his sleep, and sometimes he wondered dimly when he should wake and find himself in the crooked little wind-buffeted, storm-beaten house on the mountain, with his mother's sad, dull-colored face at the other side of the table. The "King's House," as he named it to himself, was a many-roomed mansion, where there were flowers and summer weather all the year, and many soft-footed servants, and everything moved beautifully and smoothly and noiselessly for those two, the King and Elva, and now for him, just nobody as he was—just only Little Brother !

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Everybody was very, very kind to him, and he was given a dear, steep-shouldered room at the very top of the house . . . a room with snow-white walls and a white bed that it made one sleepy just to look at, and the rugs and curtains of a rich, deep red—the color Little Brother loved best of all! But the dearest thing about this bird's nest of a room, and the thing that made him soonest at home, was the view from the windows. It was a clear-cut, widespread view of housetops and spires, great masses of brick and stone like cliffs and crags, and, beyond all, the harbor . . . and the ships . . . like another sky with white sails for clouds!

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When the dark came creeping, and a million million points of light sprang out in a second, Little Brother thought it all quite as beautiful as the meadow full of fireflies at home, or even as a starry sky seen brokenly through the branches of the great maple tree that grew close to his window in the attic bedroom on Fray Mountain. He would creep up there all alone at twilight, and curl himself up on the red-cushioned window-seat, and look and dream and look while the winter night fell close about him like a blanket, until one of the servants would come for him and carry him off, blinking like a small owl, to a gay supper in the

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brightly lighted nursery with Little Sister!

“How *good* everything tastes when I am looking at you, dear!” he often said to her.

And Elva, perched daintily opposite at the low, round table, would smile instead of pouting a little over her bowl of bread and milk, as I am afraid she had been inclined to do on the tiresome nights when she had had supper all alone.

Nor would it do at all to speak the least bit rudely to nurse when Little Brother was about. He was so very, very polite to the servants; more than just polite, in fact, for he made friends with them all directly.

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The housekeeper, a large, fair-haired, soft-voiced Norwegian woman, soon got to mother him as she had never felt free to mother the little girl who held her head with the brown curls as proudly as if she were a king's daughter indeed ! The tall coachman would n't unbend the least bit for anybody but Little Brother ; and even the last and humblest housemaid lay in wait for him in dark corners just on the chance of a smile !

After Little Brother had had time to make friends with the city itself, he told Little Sister that it wasn't so very different, after all. You see, the streets were like great gorges,

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and the traffic rushed and roared along their narrow beds like rivers, almost, and the city blocks stood up as gaunt and tall and forbidding as the crags on Fray Mountain !

“ You used to say the fir-wood was like a church,” suggested Elva, one Sunday after they had all been to a high mass in the great cathedral. “ Is n’t the real church bigger and beautifuller than you thought?”

“ The fir-wood seems to me the real church, now,” he answered truthfully. “ That church we went to this morning . . . it ’s all pointed, like the firs . . . and the windows are like sunset on the snow . . . and the organ sounds something like the

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wind among the branches. I think they made it as much like the outdoor church as they could; but you see God feels nearer there in the wood! Maybe He likes his own church best."

"I never knew this side of the world was so lonesome," was another saying of his that made Little Sister open her brown eyes wide. "It's the people you don't know, I s'pose, that make it the lonesomest place I ever was in. Not here in the King's House, dear; it's warm and happy here in this room where we all love each other, just like summer down by the brown brook and the mother-maple! No, I mean in

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the street, the street that is always full of people, and the people are always different . . . people you don't know . . . and always their faces look sad . . . and strange . . . and far away . . . like mother's used to sometimes . . . ” His voice trailed off into a sad silence.

The children were not taken on the street very often, however, for the King's House was on a quiet square in the older part of the town, and there was a little park where they played after they had done their lessons. For these, masters came at appointed hours, and Little Brother soon became as great a favorite with them as he already was with the

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servants. The music-master could have told you after one look at the boy's long, nervous fingers that he must be a genius ; the Latin master smiled and rubbed his hands together whenever he spoke of him ; and as for the teacher of English, she was a lady, and it is certain that she dearly loved Little Brother. In a wonderfully short time the terror that had been born and bred in him, the shrinking and the dread of facing strangers, was quite, quite gone. All the men seemed to him as kind and good as Don, almost, and all the women, from the calm, fair-haired Norse housekeeper to the violet-scented ladies who took him on their

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silken laps and caressed him with their white, ringed fingers, looked at him out of soft, maternal eyes.

Beside his own dear room up under the roof, with its outlook over the city, and the shining, spotless nursery where he played and ate with Little Sister, and the still, stately library where they met with their masters, and the great ball-room where Little Sister danced for her pleasure and his own and they both practiced their music, there was one spot that Little Brother haunted continually, till he grew to love it best of anything in the King's House. He was free to go wherever he would: the splendid

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rooms, all warm as summer and heavy with the scent of flowers, were open to him at all hours; he was as free of them as he had been of the bit of woods at the foot of the mowing! And the little bent, hurrying figure, the bristling dark head, and the serious, pale face that broke now and then into so appealing a smile, were soon known of all who came and went in the house to be those of a blessed little familiar — the “King’s Minstrel,” as somebody called him once. Best of all, I say, he loved to slip away from master and servants and guests, and even from the half-protecting presence of his Little Sister, and to stand wor-

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shipfully at gaze before a certain picture in the great gold-and-white drawing-room.

The picture was the first thing you saw when you came into the room. It was a picture of a Mother and a Child, sunk so deeply in heavy mouldings of dull gold that it seemed to be set in a golden niche or shrine. The King's face glowed when he spoke of his treasure; it was hundreds of years old, he told Little Brother, and yet the colors in it shone as clear and pure as if the painter had dipped his magic brush in them but yesterday!

The Mother was a woman so beautiful that it made your heart

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ache just to look at her ; her eyes and hair were dark, like the hair and eyes of the women of that old painter's country, and in those glorious eyes were so much love and sadness that the boy's own eyes would often fill up and overflow as he stood there. Love and sadness always go together, he somehow fancied . . . quite wrongly, perhaps . . . at least many people have another notion altogether.

In her bosom lay the Child, his lovely limbs shining against the sweep of her dark garments like a pearl ; in his looks a heavenly sweetness ! Little Brother used to stand in front of the picture a long, long

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time, not praying exactly, and yet it was almost that . . . for he wanted, oh, so much! to find out why the Mother looked so sorrowfully at her boy when he was so perfect and so beautiful, and what it was in the picture that was more than love and more than sorrow. He decided at last that it was like the feeling you have when you are all alone with God.

No one ever interrupted Little Brother when he stood before the Madonna. If any one chanced to come in and find him there, he went out again softly, without speaking.

“Do you know about Christmas, Little Brother?” This was Elva’s

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question, and Little Brother said “Yes” without any hesitation, for Don had really told him a good deal about Christmas.

He knew, for instance, that on that night the oxen got up and kneeled down at midnight with their faces to the east, because they heard the angels singing. To be sure, he himself had never seen them, any more than he had seen the thorn-tree that Jesus’ crown was plucked from bloom out white, as he was quite sure it did on every Christmas eve.

He knew about Santa Claus, too, — that good old man who lives in the chimney, in a house with neither

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windows nor doors ! It is true that Don had said “ he comes down the chimney,” but to Little Brother’s fancy he lived there all the year round, with the swallows and the Fire Spirit and the Old Witch as house-mates. He even knew about “hanging up your stocking,” and had done this religiously for two — no, three — Christmases, even though his mother had faintly discouraged the ceremony. Moreover, there had always been apples and cakes in it, next morning !

Elva listened sweetly to the very end of what he knew, and then she had *her* say.

“And do you know about the

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Yule-log? and the Christmas pudding? and the bells that sing carols on Christmas morning? Oh, oh, Little Brother! *Do* you know the Christmas tree, all shining and splendid, with the white Christmas angel on the tip-top?"

Little Brother shook his head very soberly, and Little Sister danced round and round him in glee, just as she used to do in the wood. (How long ago it seemed!)

The very next day, the greens were brought in, and the King's House was decked with prickly, red-berried holly, a laurel wreath hung in every window, a little tree set in each corner of the great hall, and a

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sprig of mistletoe fastened to the many-branched chandelier.

How the children's eyes shone when the Yule-log was dragged in! for it was a custom of the house to sing songs and tell stories, sitting in a half-circle about it in the fire-light, until it had burned itself quite out. For that one night they were allowed to sit up as late as they liked, and if they dozed in corners and were finally carried off to bed, it is really no concern of ours. Remember, too, children, that it was only once a year!

Next night there came the Christmas tree itself! Little Brother had seen hundreds and hundreds of them

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in the wood, straight and green, hung with ice jewels or sparkling with snow; but a Tree in the middle of a warm room, a-glitter with lights and colors like the King's table, this was something that it had never even come into his head to imagine!

He was n't sure at first that the Tree liked being transplanted; but when he found that all the beautiful presents and ornaments were to go to a hospital, to children who were lame or sick or hurt, it seemed certain that it was enough to give so much happiness, even if one had to leave the cool greenwood forever.

Another custom of the house,

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that no gifts were to be exchanged among themselves on that day, though many people thought it odd, seemed entirely natural to Little Brother. Elva's father certainly denied her nothing on common days; but the Child's Birthday, he said, must be a day set apart to love and sacrifice.

Little Brother had lived a good while in the King's House before he made any more poems, or even thought of the old ones. Quite suddenly, one day, he began again, just as a bird that has been silent a long time begins to twitter and sing.

“The poetry is real; no doubt

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about that," the King declared to his friends. "I never knew a child in the least like him—I don't believe anybody ever did—and yet he's every bit a child! Poetry is simply his native dialect!"

"Strange we are all so slow to realize that the earliest speech is song!" murmured the one whose happy thought it had been to name Little Brother the "King's Minstrel."

But there were those who smiled and exchanged glances; and the King knew that people were no more than trees now to Little Brother, and a room full of strangers no more fearful than a strange wood.

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If the rhymed fancies melted away in the sharing, like frost pictures on a window-pane, no one would be hurt — least of all Little Brother ; but if the people could see the pictures before they vanished, he would be glad because he had something to give. So one evening, when the gold-and-white drawing-room was filled with ladies and gentlemen, Elva suddenly appeared and settled like a white butterfly upon her favorite “throne-chair”—a very old, very high, carved Spanish chair made of black, black worm-eaten oak. A black-clad little pigmy figure followed soberly, and Little Brother gave a quick look around,

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dragged a foot-stool for himself in front of the Madonna picture, flashed one smile like a sunbeam into the company and began : —

“ Deep in the lonely forest,
High on the mountain side,
Long is the dreary winter,
Short is the summer tide — ”

His voice was a surprise, it was so round and full and rich for a puny child’s voice ; and as verse after verse rolled out, the little house leaning slantwise away up on the shaggy side of Fray Mountain, the pine-wood and the daisied mowing, the stillness and the separateness and the beauty and the sadness of that

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old, far-off life crept like a simple little strain of music into the hearts of all those people, and the room became very still indeed.

Then Little Brother said the “Little Children of the Spring,” and the “Folded Wings,” and several of the little poems that Elva loved—her dear face floating before his eyes in its frame of tumbled curls, and the airy little shape in the embrace of the stately throne-chair seeming to lean toward him caressingly.

When he stopped, there was a faint hum of sympathy, and kind looks were bent upon him, and there were even some wet eyes . . . for the

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people on the other side of the world are real people, and they too were children once . . . some of them were very poor children, perhaps, and lived in the country !

Now his eyes got bigger and blacker, and a red blush of happiness crept into his pale cheeks, and after quite a long pause he burst out into some verses which no one there, not the King or Elva, had ever heard before:—

“This world is all a Poem, braided lines
 like sun and rain ;
Winter is the rhyme to summer, joy is
 always rhymed with pain ;
Youth and age are in the Poem ; you
 can hear it if you try —

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If you listen in a lonely place — a-swinging through the sky !

“God is the wondrous Poet who matched
the day and night ;

He made your heart to answer to some
other in his sight ;

He scatters tears and laughter, He plays
with life and time ;

He gives you half the stanza — but you
must find the rhyme ! ”

The next minute both children
were gone, and the company drew
a long breath. “Wonderful ! phenomenal ! ” exclaimed one and another ; but the man who had first named the “King’s Minstrel” by that name which all had adopted, murmured only : “Heart of a child ! ”

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With the first faint stirrings of the spring something awoke in Little Brother's heart, and he began to be restless and uneasy. The charm of the city no longer held him, and the far outlook from his window seemed to beckon him out and away. One day Elva found him before the picture he loved so well, and when at last he turned and their eyes met, she fancied that he stood a long, long way off, like somebody in a dream.

She was troubled and wanted to cry out to him: "Can't you be happy here with us, Little Brother?" But the words would n't come. You know how it is in a dream sometimes

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... how you try to speak and can't speak.

"I know now why she looks so sorrowfully at the Child," Little Brother murmured, turning again to the picture. "She is afraid he will grow up and go away from her and not need her any more. . . . I think my mother wants me. I feel as if it was time to go home. . . . Perhaps the poem is n't finished yet and nobody but me can find the rhyme!"

After a pause he added: "I wonder if the mountain looks just the same! I think the arbutus must be shut up tight, waiting for me to come."

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This time the rush of the iron horse was like the glad rush of wings, because he was going home! All the way he kept close to the window, watching—watching—and the first sight of the proud purple mass of Fray Mountain heaved up against an April sky was as a vision of the Delectable Mountains to Little Brother o' Dreams.

VI

THE BEE-MAN OF FRAY MOUNTAIN

BEHIND the crooked little house on Fray Mountain, that seemed to shrink back under its overhanging roof-tree, and peer sadly out of dim, small window-panes at the rare passer-by, there stood upon a long, low bench a row of home-made beehives. The little old house looked quite as if nobody lived in it; but in truth one did, nor did he lack for company, since in each of these weather-stained, low-ceiled huts there dwelt ten thou-

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sand thorny virgins, every one on fire
with zeal for their City of Treasure!

The woods that gloomed high and dark around the lonely clearing were already melting into the gold-green dance of spring . . . and tirelessly these sped on airy highways to and from their shadowy halls, robbing the hoary orchard of its earliest sweets, and visiting every violet and dandelion that kept open house in the grass.

In the cool spring twilight the Bee-Man was bending over his children—listening, as so many times before, now happily, now anxiously, to the mysterious voice of the hive. What he heard, that soft May night, was no simple chant of labor, no

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thrilling hymn of victory, but something deeper yet—a nameless, prophetic something that to you or me would have told no story, but to him was plain as words could make it. Softly he laid an ear to each of his hives in turn, until it had unraveled for him the shrill song of the young mothers within their sealed cradles, insistent that their hour had come.

“Make room! make room!” sang the fiery unborn mothers. “We go! we go!” came the deep antiphony of the restless hive.

“To-morrow they adventure forth to find a new world! Even so a boy did once, little thinking how short that wonderful journey would

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prove," said the Bee-Man to himself, plucking fresh apple-leaves to sweeten the clean, empty hive which he had long since made ready for the expected swarm. Then he sat quiet for a long time, with his chin sunk in the hollow of his two hands, and eyes as it were looking inward. It was quite dark when he got upon his feet at last and went slowly away to the small house, joyless and cold, with no welcoming ray of light at any window, and the bare woods echoed sadly the long creak of the sagging door as he pulled it shut behind him.

The sun was not many hours high,

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next morning, when two barefoot children suddenly halted midway of the clearing — halted and stared at a dim, golden cloud that drifted above their heads, low against the blue.

“ Bee-Man, yer bees is a-swarm-in’ ! ” they shrilled in chorus, two long, brown forefingers pointing out the strange sight to the Bee-Man, who only nodded and smiled that tranquil, heart-breaking smile of his by way of reply.

“ ‘ A swarm o’ bees in May
Is worth a load o’ hay ! ’ ”

piped Sis, and immediately shrugged her blue calico shoulder to meet the tousled yellow head that she

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bowed upon it in a fit of eloquent shyness.

“Our folks allers beats tin pans and hollers t’ call ‘em down,” Bub volunteered.

Still the Bee-Man did not speak quite at once. His eyes were on the golden cloud; and although they were his bees, and he had builded their destined house with his own hands, it seemed in that minute of gazing that he really hoped they would carry out their brave adventure to the end, and glide away, away to the safe hollow of some old storm-stricken tree in the sunless recesses of the Big Woods on Fray Mountain! To dare all — to

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shake off the clutches of the past
—to spurn the familiar and the
homely for the untried and strange
—who has not at some time heard
that all but irresistible call to the
spirit?

“Isn’t it a little early for wild
strawberries?” he suggested at last,
coming back to the children and
to solid ground again, and noting
that each swung a small tin pail
from one sunburnt hand.

“Oh, we ain’t come after straw-
b’ries,” Bub blurred out. “Ma
wants to know ’f you kin let her
have a settin’ of turkey aigs;” and
he dug, abashed, into the soft turf
with bare pliant toes.

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“Well — perhaps; if you can find the turkey’s nest,” smiled the Bee-Man, looking dreamily toward the gold-green woods. “You see, the mother turkey’s nest is not so easy to find! . . . Can you both wait a while? For I must hive my bees first!”

Upon this, and without other answer, both small guests dropped down on the short grass with a fine air of having the day before them, and next minute the boy lay at full length, his arms stretched luxuriously over his head, kicking a battered straw hat high in the air by way of putting himself at ease, while Sis demurely untied the

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strings of a faded pink sunbonnet and fanned herself with it, watching the Bee-Man all the while out of the tail of her eye.

“What do the blame things want to swarm fer, anyhow?” Bub demanded.

“It’s this way,” the Bee-Man began. “You see, the Little People of the Hive are all one big family. There is the Mother Bee, first of all; just one mother for all these thousands and thousands of busy little working-girls that gather honey, and fetch water, and build cells upon cells, all exactly alike, and sweep out the hive, and tend the babies, and keep the door so

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that no stranger may come in! These others with their large glittering eyes do no work at all—they only feast and play. But among the thousands of babies in their waxen cradles, there are perhaps three or four who will be Mother Bees, too, some day. Now when she knows that her daughters are growing restless and her children too many for the old home, the old Mother leaves the hive she has founded and goes out into the wide world to found a new—and her children follow her—”

“Pa said it’s the King Bee that rules the hive,” interrupted Bub.

“No, no, it’s the Mother that

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rules—there is no King of the Bees,”
reproved the Bee-Man. “Just listen!

“ Little workers, little workers
 In the summer and the sun,
In the deep bush, honey-hearted,
 Where a thousand glean as one—
Teach me, worn and eager workers,
 Eager, ardent, fierce and strong,
All the passion of your striving,
 All the meaning of your song!

“ Little Mother, little Mother,
 Clinging to the chambered comb
In the darkness and the silence,
 In the pent-up heart of home—
Teach me, pale and prisoned Mother,
 Spent with giving, big with fate :
No more seeking—no more striving—
 Teach me how to love — and wait !”

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The children listened, and smiled slyly at one another; for they had heard folks say that the Bee-Man “was n’t all there;” and his poetry seemed to be the proof of this. How *can* a poet be “all there,” when the soul of him is somewhere else? And besides, the poem told them next to nothing about the bees.

“What happens in the old home after the Mother is gone?” Sis wanted to know.

“As soon as she is gone,” answered the Bee-Man, “some of the nurses who have been left behind to do just that, go to one of the cradles and let out a little young mother — the Mother of the future!”

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“But you said there might be three or four mother-cradles; suppose they all wanted to come out?”

“Usually these little nurses are very watchful and let them out one at a time,” he answered, “but if there *should* be more than one, they would have to fight until only one was left!”

At this the deep-blue eyes of little Sis sparkled shrewdly. Anybody, almost, could understand that!

All the while they had been talking they had never once lost sight of the swarm, and now it was really beginning to settle in a great, black, pear-shaped cluster, upon the tip of the topmost bough of the largest maple tree in the little clearing.

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The Bee-Man, who was little and quick, ran and fetched his hive, laying it carefully on a white cloth underneath the tree. Then he stood up and measured with his eye, first, the height of the branch that was bending far over, now, with the weight of the bees, and then the length of a small ladder that lay upon the ground. Clearly, the ladder was far too short.

Without a word Bub hurled himself upon the rough trunk of the tree and clasped its mighty column with sinewy brown legs and arms. Up, up he went, inch by inch, scarcely ever slipping back, until he had reached and drawn himself up

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by the lowest branch. In a twinkling his agile bare feet touched the bough just under the one bearing the motionless swarm.

“Gently, now, gently,” cautioned the Bee-Man’s deep organ-tones from below; but the little sister was all a-thrill with sympathetic fear.

“Oh, Bee-Man, are you *sure* they won’t sting him?” she pleaded.

“Not if he is n’t afraid, and does n’t hurry. You should never be afraid of my little working-girls. They do not sting their friends; they only sting in defense of their Mother and their City of Treasure!”

Now Bub reached forth his long, lean arm and very, very gently he

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plucked the bees, as one would pluck a branch loaded with ripe fruit. Slowly, very slowly, he began to descend the tree, helping himself awkwardly with his left hand and holding the laden branch in the right. In case of a slip, there would be not only the fall to the ground, which was no trifle, but the wrath of the aroused bees as well. And they were so many, so terribly many!

Great tears of fright rolled one by one down the little girl's glowing cheeks, but she was far too wise to cry out. With hands tightly clasped together and raised as if in prayer, she gazed up into the great tree out of eyes like bits of rain-washed sum-

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mer sky, only saying over and over under her breath:—

“Oh, Bee-Man, dear Bee-Man, are you *sure*? ”

It seemed like years before the boy slid cautiously down the maple’s gray bole, still grasping the branch of bees in his hard, small fist, and laid his prize tenderly upon the clean white cloth. Then he stood back, pale through all the freckles, while smiles drunk up the tears from the girl’s happy face.

The Bee-Man knelt down at once before his puzzled and hesitating swarm and began with bare hands to search for the Little Mother, letting the black stream sift through his

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long, nervous fingers. As soon as he had found and placed her in the new home, she was eagerly surrounded by her maidens, singing their hymn of rejoicing in harvests to come !

The hiving of the bees thus happily accomplished, the three friends set out together to hunt the mother turkey's nest.

Now of all the winged flocks that man has tamed, not one is so little tame as this shy, awkward, anxious bird that loves a wide range and wild food, roosts by choice in the tallest tree and nests in the open woods. Perhaps you will not wonder much that it was almost as hard for the Bee-Man to spy out the intimate secret

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of the new nest as to hive in homely security the adventurous swarm, whose scouts were even then returning with news of an immense hollow oak on the far side of Fray Mountain! He fell back a little, and allowed the two children, who had a keen scent for any sort of a trail, to push eagerly forward in the direction taken by the mother turkey, some two hours earlier.

“Sh’d think the foxes would get her, sure,” Bub chanted, after they had gone perhaps a quarter of a mile.

“So they might,” the Bee-Man admitted. “A fox carried off one of my turkeys last spring, when she was sitting in these very woods on eleven

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eggs. They don't often find the nest unless the mother is sitting."

"*I* know — she covers it up with leaves," flashed Sis. "Oh-h-h!"

A furtive, whity-brown shape slid out of a brush-heap not far away, stretched her long neck and began to peck indifferently to left and right, with quite the air of being out for a common, every-day grasshopper hunt.

Both children flew to the brush-heap, and after a minute's cautious search Sis tenderly uncovered seven beautiful, great, freckled eggs, yet warm from a certain motherly breast!

When at last the two children had

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slipped away down the grass-grown road — little Sis with her precious turkey eggs carefully packed in her tin pail — Bub carrying with equal care his pail filled with new honey — the Bee-Man curled himself up on the broad, flat door-stone and clasped his boyish knees with long, brown hands.

Did you ever stumble upon a certain pond deep in the woods, almost at the top of the mountain — a pond that the country folk call the “Black Pool”? Just such bottomless, black eyes had the hermit of Fray Mountain! The owner of the eyes shut them for a minute, and heard his darling bees droning in the lilacs, and a happy

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bluebird comforting his mate with song while she brooded her four eggs in the heart of the old apple tree, and he drank deep of the May balm that always carried him back to long-ago springs.

Again he was Little Brother o' Dreams, companioned by the trees and the clouds and winds, befriended by all creatures, wild or tame, about the small clearing on the mountain side, and most of all by Don, the good-hearted giant of those boyhood days! Again he was dressed and fed and watched over by his mother, with that strange, sorrowful carefulness of hers that somehow reminded him of love with all the sun gone out

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of it—just the toil and sharpness of love without the sweet! He thought once more those curious, eager thoughts about everything, and especially about the other side of the world.

Then there rushed over him for a minute, like a great wave, that well-remembered terror of loneliness, that despair of knowing what they had always tried to keep from him—that he was different from the others; that he must always be lonely—and different. Again the drowsy, lilac-scented afternoon turned dark around him as the awful abyss rose to meet his soul and swallowed it up in hopeless blackness.

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And then — out of the blackness
a soft light shining — a delicate
hand stretched across the gulf to
meet his hand — a long-dreamed-
of, dimly foreseen, impossible com-
panionship — a Little Sister !

And then — at last — the other
side of the world ; a King's House
full of splendors undreamed-of, yet
after all strangely like the splendors
of the mountain ; a King's bounty
opening to him the doors of the old
learning and the new ; a seat at Little
Sister's nursery table ; servants and
guests alike loving him, and his Heart
Songs earning for him the caresses
of beautiful women and the tears of
strong men !

BEE-MAN OF FRAY MOUNTAIN

Afterward . . . well, afterward his mother needed him, and the mountain called him and he came back — back to the old home that was the same, yet not quite the same, for now he had seen what lay beyond the mountain, and he was able to choose with clear eyes — to choose — the sacred right of all free men!

And now Little Brother opened his eyes and unclasped his hands and held his head as high as he could, recalling for the hundredth time the choice that he had made finally when he was fifteen and motherless — for the King had held out a hand to him all those years, and Little Brother had lived with the books

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

he sent until they had become a part of himself. When the tired, sorrowful mother let go her hold of life at last and left him alone, the King wrote a letter to Little Brother o' Dreams.

Well, the answer to that letter, gentle as it was, displeased the King — for kings are not wont to have their bounty refused in any fashion, however manly or humble — and he wrote no more. The great house high on the other side of the wood, that was known all through the country side as the “Castle in the Air,” had been closed these fifteen years. For a while it was left with a care-taker while the King and his

BEE-MAN OF FRAY MOUNTAIN

daughter crossed the Big Water and journeyed in the countries of the sun. Time passed, and the care-taker bolted the great door and put up the shutters and went away; yet more time, and the roses grew up into great half-wild thorn trees and made free with the graveled walks, the smooth lawn became a flaunting meadow, giant vines strangled the rustic summer-house, bats and owls lived in the tower, and a plump wood-chuck burrowed under the stately front door. It was almost like the enchanted castle where a Princess slept for a hundred years . . . except that there was no Sleeping Beauty there!

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Little Brother crossed the wood once or twice every summer to be sure that the miracle should not happen without his finding it out . . . for he never doubted that it would happen, some time ! Meanwhile, he scarcely realized that he was alone ; the years were kind to him, the old roof still sheltered his head o' nights, and the forest was his house by day ; beautiful fancies wove for themselves garments of rhyme and played about him as he worked ; Don's blue-eyed children visited him, and his tireless little working - girls provided for most of his simple needs.

But what had become of Little Sister ? He had not seen her since

BEE-MAN OF FRAY MOUNTAIN

she was about twelve, when they sent her to school in a White Convent on the other side of the Big Water. Little Brother had read stories of convents, and he had vague but beautiful and rather sad thoughts of the dim, green alleys and the barred windows and the gliding Sisters with their long, black veils that framed so closely the white, tranquil faces. It seemed a strange place and strange surroundings for his sparkling Elva, with her starry looks ! She was not going to be a nun, however ; that had all been explained to him ; and he knew perfectly well that when she was seventeen she was to come home to her father's house and be

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

his Crown Princess until some Prince should win her for his bride. That was a long time ago . . . and yet he had never heard of the Prince's coming.

Just to see her once more—that was all Little Brother expected, and doubtless all that he had a right to expect. He really wasn't a child any longer; he had read too many books for that! You know, books can help one to grow up about as fast as anything; you can begin a book as a child and finish it as a man of the world . . . or a philosopher . . . that is, if it's a really great book! Little Brother knew perfectly that Elva could never again be his Little Sis-

!BEE-MAN OF FRAY MOUNTAIN

ter; that her soft brown eyes could never again rest lovingly upon his . . . nor her sweet, confident voice cry out to him as of old . . . nor her damp chestnut curls lie trustfully for one minute upon his shoulder . . . no, he had never, never imagined anything like that!

The woods had taught him a secret—only this: that *the past is ours*. We cannot lose it if we would. And so it was that those eyes—that voice—those dear, warm, tumbled curls of a brown on which the sun always shone, were his best treasures still.

And some day . . . some opal-colored day in spring . . . some long, long summer afternoon . . . some

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red October morning . . . some purple winter twilight . . . she would surely come back to Fray Mountain! He would see her once more—perhaps not even speak to her—only worship her with his bodily eyes and so set up her image anew in the inner shrine, to light him to his journey's end.

For this he had waited more than fifteen years.

VII

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

You must know that there is a certain ripe time of the year when Nature seems to pause and hold her breath, as if she had climbed to the highest height and clung there for one immortal moment. Just for a day there is no blazing sun—no solid earth—no hard, blue arch of sky. The sun is veiled with a delicate haze—dissolved in a cup of purple wine—and the mountains and valleys are asleep behind that

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

veil — drowned in that joyous wine! On such a day as this, without beginning or ending, temperate, flawless, perfect, a vision and foretaste of eternity — on such a day, if ever, should dreams come true!

It was on such a day, almost the middle of October by the calendar and something less than twelve by the clock, that a long, loose-jointed man, hoeing intermittently in his steep, side-hill garden-patch, straightened up just in time to take note of a trim female figure far below, upon the road that winds up from the Hollow, curling lovingly about the shaggy flanks of Fray Mountain. Even at that distance, the shrewd, far-sighted

blue eyes of the native made the figure out a lady,—“No sech a gal in these parts — she 's city folks!”

The lady, whoever she might be, was no laggard ; the yeoman deliberately laid open another hill of potatoes, and when his sixth sense told him that she must be about opposite, he slowly straightened up again, leaned upon his hoe in friendly fashion and regarded her at close quarters with affable interest.

She was looking directly at him, also, and the blue eyes met the brown ones with a slight shock.

“Good-morning. Can you tell me whether I am on the road to Fray Mountain?”

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

“Wa’al, if you keep straight on to the left it ’ll take ye over the maountain — past the Castle and on daown to the waterfall. . . . Stranger in these parts, I take it?”

“Thank you so much; and the road to the right?”

“Wa’al, if ye take the fust turn t’ the right, jest after you pass the old waterin’-trough . . . Autymobile broke daown? . . . Wa’al, ye know, that ain’t reely a traveled road — ain’t anybody skursely goes by that road. . . . Aiming to stop at the hotel, likely? It ’s six mile, on end!”

“I want to get to the top of Fray Mountain. Is n’t there an old wood-road that goes off to the right?”

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

“Wa’al, the fact is it’s a mighty lonesome road. . . . A young lady, alone, naow . . . Folks waitin’ fer ye a piece further along, mebbe?”

“Thank you, I think so—at least I hope so,” she answered a little breathlessly. “But does no one at all live on that road — *no* one?”

“On’y the Bee-Man — an’ he’s not over fond o’ strange comp’ny —”

“The Bee-Man?” Her soft eyes seemed to plead with him silently.

“The Bee-Man—the Hermit o’ Fray Maountain — him they used to call — Little Brother!” It was almost as if the last words were dragged from him against his will.

“Little Brother o’ Dreams!” The

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

dear old name burst from her lips before she knew, and then Little Sister dropped suddenly down by the roadside and covered her speaking face with both slender hands.

Upon this, Don hopped briskly over the stone wall and ran to the Cold Spring for a drink of water, fetching it in a home-made dipper, neatly carved from the shell of a cocoanut. Elva drank deep, half laughing and half crying as her soft palms closed on the hairy shell. She had not put her lips to such a cup for a round score of thirsty years !

“And now, Don, dear Don, tell me all about him ! Is he well — and happy ?”

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

“Wa’al, he’s so’s to be raound. Little Brother never wuz reelly rugged, ez ye might say; but I’m blessed ef he ain’t the happiest mortal on this airth!”

“Why, is he rich already—and famous? I always knew he would be, some day!”

“He’s got everything he wants, er needs, I guess; ef he ain’t rich, I dunno who is! As fer bein’ famous, they do say there ain’t a child fer miles araound but knows Little Brother—the Bee-Man they call him mostly. Ye see, he ain’t ever been strong enough to work hard, so he took to linin’ wild bees fust, an’ then to keepin’ tame ones. He sent

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

for some o' them Eyetalians last year! Makes most of his livin' off'n the honey; that an' a flock o' turkeys as most gen'lly doos well by him, when the foxes don't git 'em. . . . Whether it's the books, or jest a knack he's got with him, he sartain doos know how to handle the critters! Takes a sight o' comfort in 'em, I tell yeou!"

"Oh, I'm glad!" she breathed. "And his mother—I hope she is happy too?"

"Orter be—dead 'n' buried these fifteen year," he answered dryly. "Allus was kind o' meechin' — ever sence the boy wuz born. She helt on, though, tell he come o' man's size

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— or as near it as he ever would get; then she jest nachelly give up, 'n' I don't blame her none. He's been livin' on alone thar most ever sence; the Hermit, some calls him, o' Fray Maountain!"

"And *you* left him too? Oh, Don!"

The big fellow looked sheepish. "I'll tell you how it wuz," said he. "You see, I'd been waitin' on Phœbe here a right smart time afore the missus died. Her folks went off sudden jest about then, an' I wuz needed bad to take care o' the orphan an' tend to this leetle place o' hern — there wa'n't nobody else! Little Brother made me do it; said as I'd orter hev my own place an' my own folks.

LITTLE BROTHER O'DREAMS

... 'T aint so fur, nohow, but what I can lend a hand when wanted."

"And does he see nobody but you, Don? Doesn't he have visitors sometimes?"

"Bless you, yes! Here's my Bub an' Sis 'd ruther hev a day on the maountain with the Bee-Man 'an go to the circus, I'll bet! There's lots more got the same idee. Beats all, how he doos manage to tame the wildest of 'em! There's boys as their own fathers can't do nothin' with, but they do say as how they would n't any more sass *him* 'an one of his own bees 'd up an' sting Little Brother!"

"I know. He was always like

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

that. . . . And his—his father never came, Don? Somehow, I always thought he would, some day!"

"Wa'al, he ain't come yit," Don answered rather grimly.

"Well, I must say good-by now, and thank you . . . thank you for everything, Don!" Elva spoke so sweetly as she slid her soft little hand into his rough one, and her black-clad figure mounted so lightly from hemlock-shaded steep to steep, winding on up the mountain, that it was some minutes before the big fellow remembered that he had found out nothing about *her*—not even whom she wore black for, nor who was waiting for her and where!

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

As to this last, she herself could have had no doubts, for without any hesitation she turned to the right at the old watering-trough, diving deep into the heart of the yellow and squirrel-haunted wood, whose carpet of leaves was picked out with the coral of squaw-berries and the pale ghosts of ferns, and littered here and there with untidy heaps of tawny, half-opened burs along the old, grass-grown road. At a certain point she even left the beaten track and made straight through the wood for a loop in the brown brook, a place where there had once sat beside the tiny stream an ancient and stately dame, of very

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kindly and motherly aspect to two young, half-orphaned creatures who sometimes nestled in her ample lap and told each other all their dreams.

There still sat the old mother-maple, her brow reddened by October's wine, yet looking no whit the older for the years that had come and gone, and there in her broad lap, half hidden by those interlacing arms . . .

“Little Brother!”

“Then if I’m Little Brother, you must be Little Sister!”

It isn’t *always* sad to meet suddenly face to face somebody whom we knew and loved, a great while

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

ago. When we can look deep into the same eyes, and listen to the same tones that wound themselves about our heart-strings in that long-ago time, it is n't sad at all; unless, as you may sometimes think, the purest happiness and the most sacred sorrow are really and truly one!

For these two, Time stood still on that October day, and the hours in the wood were eternal, nothing less!

You see, Don had told Elva all the common, every-day things she needed to know; and now, like children, they spoke of the *real* things only. She begged him to tell her why he was so happy. That she had not learned that greatest of life's

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

secrets, her delicate, sharpened features showed plainly, and yet more those sorrowful brown eyes, big with unshed tears.

“Is it because you are alone, Little Brother? I have always lived in a crowd, I think; and one can’t be happy in a crowd!”

“Ah, maybe you have been more alone than I have, after all, Little Sister!”

“Then is it because you are so poor? I am almost sure that one can’t be rich and happy too!”

“Ah, but you must be poorer than I am, dear! Just think, the whole mountain is mine, with all the sweets in all the maples and all the

LITTLE BROTHER O'DREAMS

honey of all the flowers . . . and because the sun is in the sap and in the honey, I call the sun mine too! Perhaps it is because I am so ugly to look at, with all the beauty on the inside . . . or even because I have n't a name like other people — mine really means something," he added, with the whimsical smile that lighted up his dark, elfish face like a sunbeam in a cave.

"I know — it must be because you are a poet!" cried Elva.

"Perhaps; and yet being a poet doesn't mean to me what it did once," he admitted. "First of all, it meant the mountain — the glorious Out-of-Doors, and in those days I

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

could n't tell how much was outside of me and how much was really Me. Then for a while it meant You, and the other side of the world — the man-made side. But when I came back to my own place, and found Myself, I found too that I could n't lose anything I had ever had ! The Little Sisters of the spring — the White Birds of winter — the brown brook — You — my steep-shouldered room at the very top of the King's House — the sad, beautiful Madonna — my own sad, far-away mother — and even the father I never knew — they are all mine still ! There is another circle that is just a little bit outside ; Don and

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

Bub and Sis; my bees and my turkeys; all of them half wild and half tame, going and coming between the wood and the hearth. That is my life — tell me, dear, could I help being happy? And yet, now that I sit here with You beside me, I begin to think that I never was happy until to-day!"

"*I know I never was,*" said Little Sister very quietly.

Oh, what a day was that! She had slipped out of her plain black jacket and laid aside her little black hat, and the sheer white waist caressing her delicate shoulders, and the soft tendrils of hair creeping out on her damp temples, and the kisses

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

of the sun on her pale cheeks made her look more and more like the old Elva every minute. Little Brother wouldn't take her to the crooked, dark little house that no woman's hand had made home of these fifteen years; but while they talked he laid a rude hearth of flat stones from the brook, coaxed a tiny blaze and watched it die down to a mass of red coals, under which he roasted the freshest of eggs and the smoothest of potatoes. It was like two children playing house under the mother-maple! Elva spread a doll's table upon a great stump with her handkerchief and an armful of lacy ferns, and Little Brother fetched

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

from the house some brown bread on a curious pink plate, pure golden-rod honey without a tang, and an old blue pitcher of rich milk. Sitting opposite to him beside their make-believe hearth, she poured the milk and cut the bread with those endearing, womanly ways that make the simplest meal a sacrament.

Presently they spied some polished, dark-brown chestnuts lurking slyly under fallen leaves, and hunted eagerly for more, and pricked their fingers with the burs, and bit into the sweet kernels, and he filled his pockets and she her little handkerchief, like children !

“Tell me a poem,” she sighed at

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

last ; and he told her this one about the waterfall — the fairy Moss-Ghyll in the heart of the mountain :

“ Heaven-climbing stairway
Of gray granite stone ;
Little white maiden
Tripping down alone ;
Tripping on forever
From smooth stair to stair —
I seem to see her white feet,
And far-flying hair !

“ I and the maiden
A long step apart ;
The tapping of her light feet
Is wearing on my heart ;
Forever on the stairway
Of the grim gray years,
I feel her tread upon my heart
Thro’ fast-falling tears ! ”

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

“Won’t you dance for me now?” he begged.

Elva shook her head. “I have forgotten how,” she said. The shining, slippery floor of a hundred ball-rooms, the blazing lights, the swooning flower-smell, the bare shoulders of the women and the hot eyes of the men — these had blotted out for her the Age of Innocence when she had danced “Morning” and “Evening” in the wood! It was n’t that she had forgotten, exactly, but somehow she could n’t quite forget what came between. These other things were in the way . . . strange, how many things seemed to be in the way, on Fray Mountain!

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“But I remember where the fringed gentians grow,” she cried, springing gayly to her feet. Straight up through the wood she went, struck unerringly into a certain over-grassed cart-track and followed it swiftly to a great open circle, years and years ago a charcoal-pit, almost at the top of Fray Mountain ! And there she stopped short and turned a shining face on Little Brother, close behind. The tall fringed candelabra lighted all that Druid altar as with a divine azure radiance ; and after they had gazed their fill, he broke for her, reverently, as many as her hands could hold.

When they came out again into

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

the lonely clearing, with the warped and rain-blackened little house shrinking back as if trying to hide behind its century-old apple trees and overgrown lilac bushes, he led the way to his row of beehives. But Elva drew back a little, hearing the deep, menacing song of the thorny virgins, and seeing them glide on crystal wing to and from some unseasonable apple-blossom or belated spire of goldenrod.

“Surely you’re not afraid of my little working-girls?” he smiled. “Don’t you know the poem? No, it is n’t quite my own, for I found most of it in a foreign book the King gave me, years ago!

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

“ Love is like a little Bee,
Bringing honey endlessly ;
Only with the sweet she brings
Angry songs and poison stings !

“ Hive within my heart, dear Bee !
Live forevermore with me ;
If my Bee her honey brings
I can bear the songs and stings ! ”

Then Elva gave a little sob like a hurt child. “ The dear King loved you so, Little Brother ! ” she cried. “ He wanted you to stay with us always, you know ; and yet — and yet — somehow I knew you would not always be content to be what they called you then — the ‘ King’s Minstrel ! ’ You were God’s singer

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

— not the King's! — But do you never hear the world's voices calling — the voices of the people who loved to hear your poems from your own lips in the King's drawing-room? Are you never coming back to the other side of the world, Little Brother?"

"I'm afraid I don't know how to live my own life anywhere but on Fray Mountain. . . . But you? You are coming back to the enchanted castle on the other side of the wood — the castle that has been asleep so long?"

The delicate head drooped lower. "I can't. It would n't ever be the same again. We—we could n't meet

WHEN DREAMS COME TRUE

every day by the brown brook and the mother-maple, dear Little Brother! And I am all alone now!"

The Bee-Man stood quite still, and his long, nervous fingers clenched themselves tightly together. A color and a light that Elva had never seen before flooded the pale, pleading face. There was only one word left unsaid between them, and the deep voice, musical and deep and irresistible as some mighty river, dared to bear it up and into her waiting ear.

"Then I say, as I have said in my dreams: Stay here with me—stay on my side of the world forever, little sister of my soul!"

Once more the impossible had hap-

LITTLE BROTHER O' DREAMS

pened . . . the warm curls nestled on his shoulder. . . . When at last she lifted up her head and gazed straight into those eyes that glowed like cathedral windows, the sun rested for a moment as if in blessing upon the blood-red crown of Fray Mountain, and the whole world seemed to fill and overflow with solemn music, like the tones of a great organ never made with hands.

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